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YEARS OF A FIERY YOUTH

— Comrade Enver Hoxha's book «Years of My Youth» —

Art and literature have among other things shown how the life of man can be a treasure of experience and lessons, an example which you would like to follow, a valuable part of history. If the life of an ordinary man can also be passionate and very meaningful, what can be said of the life of a genius?

Written memoirs are concrete evidence of one's own life experience. A single page of literature, raised into art, can be so truthful that you cannot distinguish it from real life. You live with it, you feel its pulse, and this is not an illusion. A page of memoirs, raised into art, is a door into the past realities, into snatches of life, as it was. The value of art, in this case, lies in the directness of expression, in the natural communication and not in an affected and laboured style with which many a well-known writer of memoirs becomes boring. The writer who narrates as if talking to his family, to his own folk, wins the reader's heart.

Enver Hoxha, as we and the entire people have known him both from his memoirs and from his daily life, is one of them. He was the leader of the Party, the War, the state. Cheek by jowl with the people, he grew before our eyes to the proportions of the man who makes an epoch, from whom we could never detach ourselves. He was both a leader and a friend, either when he engaged in a calm conversation or when holding a most solemn speech. He had a direct manner and a powerful emotional speech in his communication with the people, either in meetings or on the screen. And this is how we see him in his memoirs, too.

In this new book, *Years of My Youth*, he says that when he wrote these pages he did not mean to publish them, but wanted to leave them to his family, so that they have it in writing, just as he had told them

about it in a stroll or over the meals, on diverse occasions. In a note to his wife, Comrade Nexhmije, he says:

«I've tried to remember things as they were, realistically, and to write them as they happened, without varnish. I cannot varnish things, because if I did all this would lose its sense, and it is not worth writing them at all in that way.» And he continues «What I am writing is only for you and the children.»

This passage reflects the author's concept about memoirs, that they should be written realistically, flowing from the soul. And presented in that manner, the memoirs of the beloved leader, are addressed both to his nearest folk and to us, to the people at large. These memoirs had to be published, because they constitute a treasure for all of us.

The qualities of Comrade Enver's memoirs can be seen in his previous volumes, both when he wrote about his childhood in Gjirokastra, in *Years of My Childhood* (1983), which is filled with unforgettable romantic passages full of nostalgia, or when he wrote about the years of the Liberation War in *Laying the Foundations of the New Albania* (1984), which he called memoirs and historical notes, because they are really so, but which, with their epic spirit, are full of the romanticism so common in triumphant years.

Albanian literature is still young and unexperienced in the field of memoirs. We can say that memoirs, real and proper, begin only with Ismail Qemali's memoirs, which he did not write himself, but told them to someone who put them on paper. Fan S. Noli, who had the gift of the pen, published some memoirs of his own childhood and youth, perhaps guided by the idea that if he did not write them himself, that part of his life would be left to the mercy of oral fable without documents. He just put them down on paper, not with the nostalgia of the man in an emotional moment, but almost like a simple mechanical recorder. Besides, his memoirs, like those of Qemali's, the Old Man of Vlora, have come down to us in foreign languages.

Memoirs, as a genre of literature and history, is not new in the world. Whereas in our country it is rather the creation of the years of socialism and is represented by under a hundred volumes. Among them there are valuable works, both as testimony and as art. But it was a great good fortune that its greatest author, who raised it immediately to the most coveted heights, is Enver Hoxha.

Enver Hoxha, as a philosopher and political personality, scientist and erudite, publicist and orator, with his pen tested in so many fields, had the quality of the fine memoir writer, who makes an epoch both ways, both because he writes in the way he knows and because he

inaugurates a genre in a masterly manner. And his gifted pen immediately raised the Albanian memoirs to the vanguard.

Through snatches from the life of a small people the world can have an insight into an extremely important historical experience. The unforgettable leader of the Albanian people had a life which few can rival in richness and achievements. This life is an invaluable national treasure. In this book, which comes as a gift to us today, we see the growth and formation of a man, ready to make epochal actions. Such memoirs, being of national value, immediately become part of the international treasure.

Comrade Enver Hoxha's memoirs about his childhood and about the War, and his *Diaries* form a series in themselves. The present volume, a posthumous work, was a link, which he could not fail to create in order to complete the literary chain about his life which he left to us. This volume completes a cycle of books of memoirs from his childhood until the years after Liberation. With its inspiration and feeling, with the wealth of facts and details of a local and foreign fragrance stored in a fresh memory, with a whole gallery of characters, the present work is not just a recording of facts about his life, it is a work of art, which brings the truth directly from the source. Written in the 1970s, it reproduces the image of Enver Hoxha in his youth, the young Enver telling of his youthful years, as he has remained in the memory of the nation, despite the age he reached.

The volume opens in Korça and is closed in Korça. Enver came to Korça in 1927, when still a boy, to continue his studies for three years, because the lycée of Gjirokastra had been closed. He continued his studies in this new school, which was a French lycée, too. He left Korça in 1930 for higher studies abroad and returned to Korça in 1936, this time as a teacher at the lycée where he had been a student.

If in the volume of memoirs *Years of My Childhood*, which is about the early period of his life, the reader follows all the impressive details of the all-round formation and education of Enver as a child, an education which is permeated through and through by the patriotic orientation, in this new book *Years of My Youth* this spirit assumes the revolutionary dimension and form of the supreme social ideal, the communist ideal. This ideal was the bedrock of the youthful Enver Hoxha and, in the subsequent volumes of memoirs, which have been printed, we can see how he became the greatest reality of his country with the founding of the Party, the triumph of the National Liberation War, the creation of the People's Republic and the advance of Albania on the socialist road.

The first chapter of this volume is entitled «At the Lycée of Korça», and the seventh and last chapter of the book, which stands for an epilogue, «When I come to Korça». This epilogue, written in the 1970s,

seems to have been built in an entirely different vein from the rest of the book, it is a nostalgic return to the place of his youth he loved. This epilogue is a fresh returning to the fiery youth, a link which organizes the six chapters.

In the first chapter Comrade Enver writes:

«Korça occupies a special favourite place in my life. I was born and passed my childhood in Gjirokastra; I strengthened my limbs in its beautiful cobbled streets and alleys; I got my first lesson about the Homeland, the people and the life there. Whereas Korça is the town of my youth, and the youth is the age when man's character is determined, when his way in life is outlined.»

And during the period of time he was in Korça his character was formed, and his way of life was outlined on the road of the communist who writes:

«I consider it a great fortune that I had the opportunity to study and live in Korça, precisely in those years when there more than anywhere else in the Albania of that time a new ideology of movement, the ideology of the communist movement, had begun to take root and to take its first steps.» And about the proletarians of Korça he says: «I am not exaggerating if I say that they gave our youth the proper orientation in life; I do not flatter anyone of them when I say that they were our first teachers of communism.»

It must be noticed that Comrade Enver, in this case, writes in the plural, saying «gave our youth», in order to stress the national role of the proletarians of Korça in the beginnings of the Albanian communist movement on the eve of the formation of the Party, describing them as «our first teachers of communism». He goes on to tell that it was Koci Bako, the first martyr on the morrow of the founding of the Party, who was the first to get hold of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Koci, with his communist intuition, was quick to size up and appreciate the qualities of the lycée student. Precisely about that Party were the dreams of the young student.

The proletarians of Korça sought out the young teacher of the lycée immediately after his return to their town; they did not give him a long time to contact them again. They found their wise and original way of conspiracy, sending Raqi Themeli to «repair» professor's stove, which did not «draw» (Chapter 6, «The Final Return to Albania»).

For his part, Enver Hoxha who immediately after his return from abroad had met Ali Kelmendi in Gjirokastra and had talked with him about the Communist Group of Korça, was ready to meet and link himself with the proletarian communists of this group, with its old guard: Miha Lako, Pilo Peristeri, Sotir Gurra and others.

The whole of the first chapter, devoted to the society of Korça with its cultural and revolutionary aspects, reveals the connection

between this atmosphere and the spirit of the period of the Albanian Renaissance. Korça of the years 1920-1930, just as Gjirokastra of his childhood, retained fresh in their memory the struggle for freedom, a struggle which had many an outstanding figure. One of them, Mihal Grameno, a comrade-in-arms of Çerçiz Topulli, had, not many years ago precisely at Korça, extolled the figure of Lenin and the very name «bolshevik» in the press; precisely in Korça where «bolshevism» now «had begun to grow and take its first steps as the ideology of the new movement.»

It was a great fortune for the young man from Gjirokastra to go to Korça for his studies. Enver Hoxha, who was only 19 years old then, continued his work to extend his knowledge and his cultural formation at a school, which with its well-studied complete programs, through one of the richest cultures, through one of the most important languages of the time, provided better possibility for learning than the other secondary schools of the country. This language, the French, learned thoroughly during nine years, opened the doors to the world culture, with the wealth of its publications. While at the lycée the boy from Gjirokastra had the opportunity to enrich his patriotic and revolutionary lessons with the study of the history of France and of the world.

The young Enver Hoxha, fresh from the Renaissance environment of Gjirokastra came to this town of another Renaissance environment eager for knowledge. At the lycée he acquired a rich literary and historical, scientific and philosophical culture. The Korça lycée put him in broad contact, especially with the rational and illuminist thinking of Descartes and Voltaire, as well as with the materialist thinking of Gassendi and Diderot, and made him dwell deeply on them. It acquainted him thoroughly with the revolutionary thinking and action which France of the years 1789, 1848, 1871 had carried far afield.

Let us mention some other universal values which were revealed to the young student through Montaigne and Ronsard of the humanistic period, who had exalted the figure of Skanderbeg; Molière and La Fontaine, who reached the peaks of the critical art of the word in the classical period; the encyclopaedists, who elaborated the new thinking and prepared the revolution; or Hugo and Balzac, two giants of poetry and prose, who were stern social judges. The student of the lycée was to learn about the revolution not only from textbooks, but especially from progressive socialist historians like Albert Mathiez and Jean Jaurès. He came to admire Anatol France as the most acute pen of the new French literature, and sympathized with the Communist Party of that country from the very beginnings of it. The young Enver, while in Paris, went to see Paul Vayant-Couturier, one of the renowned communists of the years 1920-1930, at the offices of *L'Humanité*, organ of the Communist Party, with which he collaborated. He expressed all

his admiration and esteem for the French people, for their history, literature and culture, for the distinguished figures which France has given the world.

At the lycée of Korça, the boy from Gjirokastra made numerous friends among his schoolmates and teachers from all over the regions of Albania, whom he does not forget to mention, some through a sketchy portrait, some in full descriptions.

Professor Cipo is the ideal image of the Renaissance and the profound scholar of the national language and literature. He was a man of a broad culture and fine taste, who mastered several languages and was versed in their literatures. Enver never forgot the lessons with Cipo, which were full of discerning judgements of an erudite with an artistic spirit. Nonda Bulka, Enver's schoolmate, worried about the situation of backward Albania, saw the imminent threat to the country's freedom by the despotic regime. He was preoccupied for the world, which emerged from a great war and was heading towards another still greater war. Nonda was sorry for the fate of the poor. He wrote beautifully. Young Enver, who appreciated the beautiful, was attached to Vangjush Mio, the drawing teacher, a man of gentle character, a tireless worker, a talented landscape painter who admired everything Albanian, especially the land, the life and the art of the Albanian people as a whole.

These are living examples from the life of the political figure and philosopher which began to be conceived in Enver while at old Korça. He was closely attached to some aspects of the patriotic spirit of the National Renaissance, which produced many intellectuals of the time, just as he was attached to the democratism of his time, which was expressed in personal revolt and indignation, by all those who appreciated the national culture, which they found in books and in the reality of life, a reality and civilization which they helped to advance. Enver, with his unerring intuition for the new, was able to discern the innovative manifestations in the desires of these people for a better and more dignified Albania. And the optimistic character, which was born in him, grew into enthusiasm in Korça, making him confident in the greater communist possibilities into which the workers of Korça initiated him.

What is admirable in this book, and it must not be forgotten that this is a book of memoirs in which the author could have stopped especially to dwell on the darker aspects of the time, is that he dwells on what is most brilliant. This is explained with the fact that the boy, an offspring of Uncle Çeno and a neighbour of Çerçiz, had a sharp sense of the future, of the good days to come, had an optimism which emanates from his whole being when he takes the pen to go back to his fiery youth. He was a «spark of the Albanian heaven» — as the poet of the 1930's put it to describe such personalities.

But in his retrospective passages Comrade Enver rages with anger and indignation whenever he mentions the political emigration, which returned to Albania, tailing after the Italian fascist armies (Chapter 2), or when the name of the abject monarch Zog comes under his pen, or when he analyses his regime. On more than one occasion his critical emphasis waxes bitter when he mentions some names, as Faik Konica's, for instance. In those moments he is in the grip of the anguish of the young revolutionary, who revolted to see the extreme torment of his own unfortunate people who never despaired. And thus, pain was turned into strength, which made the youth look forward and see the road of salvation for the people which he discovered in the period of his youth, both in Albania and abroad.

He returns time and again to the beauty and courage of those days, when it took a lot of courage to prepare yourself spiritually and intellectually for a really progressive future. We see this courage in each page of the book, when prepared for this while at the lycée of Korça, at the small workshops of the poor but big-hearted and sharp-minded workers of Korça, in the university halls and still more during the debates organized with the communists for their political and ideological formation, both in Montpellier and in Paris, or at the consular office at Brussels, where his table was always loaded with the works of the classics of Marxism and the proletarian press.

The chapters on the life in the lycée just as the rest of the book, with the events which they recall, breathe with the joy of a full-fledged youth who hurries on the road of learning and science because the time of the great ideals does not wait, because he feels that the moments of the final liberation for his indomitable people are approaching. He is aware that he must prepare himself for the event.

He was an admirer of science and, as a student of natural sciences, he appreciates biology, though he has some difficulties in chemistry, in botanics his spirit delights in discovering the beautiful in everything. In the practical classes of zoology the smile does not disappear from his face even when he is before a small animal which must be dissected, with the teacher of an original humour standing by and with the stick ready to signal a good stroke (Chapter 3, «In France — Montpellier»).

These pages are filled with a life that promises a better future, and with the pleasant jokes which accompany the student life. And again Migjeni must be remembered with a famous line of his written in the 1930s: «Smile, youth, smile, the world is yours!» The world was his at Korça, in Montpellier, in Paris, in Brussels, even when the people were suffering, even when he was penniless.

He had a desire to study social sciences, because he felt drawn to

law, history, literature. But they gave him a scholarship for something which did not appeal to him and he did not despair. How very typical of him and his temperament are those moments when he «forgot» to go to the right auditorium, often ending up in the hall of lectures on law. And he carries the joke further, describing the real chaos in the hall while the lecturer went on with his speech all the same.

These snatches of mirthful life are followed by whole pages on the serious debates which were held by the communists, in order to continue with some other delightful pages about a non-entity of an Albanian inspector sent by the Ministry in order to «check up» on what our students were doing in the schools abroad, at a time when for months at a stretch they did not get anything from their state, and had to backpay for their food and board. The encounter takes place at a caffè, where the students trick him into paying the bill, at which the stingy inspector kicks up a row. Although he has not brought them their bursary allowance, he threatens that he would cut it off altogether, he the ridiculous figure, who has come out together with his missus to see Europe.

Life in the boarding school occupies a conspicuous place in the first chapter, because it was the family life of the students. On this aspect I can dwell at length because I have known that sort of life during the years 1927-1930, when Comrade Enver attended his studies there. He recalls the life in the boarding school as it was, free of care and with the solidarity of the students. He recalls the large study room, where we prepared our lessons, the dark mess hall, like a cellar, but clearly. He evokes plenty of details from that period, giving life to the student youth of that time, not without some nostalgia. There is an undercurrent of joy in it, because it evokes the youth who prepared themselves seriously for their future, who were eager for culture and who worked hard for it, because the curriculum was pretty loaded, too. Discipline is conscious, but it has also its dark aspect, with the wardens behaving like gendarmes, some of whom were also spies and thieves. Some ugly character among the schoolmates is also mentioned, especially those with vices and with a superficial mind; some of them did not end up well. So, nothing is veneered. Plenty of «small details» are mentioned, but detail is essential to writing these memoirs and the author has raised them into art, they are part of the realism.

Enver in those days had a childhood friend, called Selami Xhaxhiu, an unpretentious and amiable, but rather reserved boy. We were told that he suffered from a chronic insomnia. I remember an incident, very humane and light, which I would like to reproduce here, although it is a «triviality».

I had jaundice then and was «isolated» together with Selami, I don't

quite remember for what reason, in a kind of infirmary above the mess hall, in which we were kept for two weeks. Enver came every day to see him and talk with him, but the talking always developed into a monologue; Selami did the hearing. One day Enver came in a new suit, which fitted him to perfection. I believe it is precisely that costume which he mentions in the chapter about Korça. I could appreciate something beautiful when I saw it, and I was amazed with it. So was Selami. But Enver smoked one cigarette after the other and in a moment of absent-mindedness, burned a hole into it. «What a pity!» I exclaimed. Selami's book dropped from his hand. Enver stormed out. The next day he came to see us in his old costume, in which he looked just as handsome. Whereas the day after the next in his new suit, without the hole in it. «What? Have you replaced the coat?» I asked him. He just pulled my ear and said: «Boy, in Korça there is a wonderful woman for such things,» and showed me that the burned hole had been darned beyond recognition. And then he added: «This does not mean that you should smoke cigarettes and burn your clothes.» Thinking that these words were meant for me, I swore that I didn't smoke. At which Selami burst out in laughter, which was the first and the last time I saw him laugh. The dinner bell rang, Enver went downstairs and we laughed over our cold soup...

In this same chapter Comrade Enver mentions important aspects of our life in the boarding school, like our «demonstration of bread» (in a miniature) against those who stole our food: the supplier, the vice-director and the store-keeper. He led the demonstration himself and was arrested, on that account, together with three of our comrades. Who could imagine that these were the first steps of the young revolutionary? All of us, boarding students, left the school and went to the prefecture in demonstration. The perfect, Hilë Mosi, came to meet us. He did not show any sign of irritation at our revolt, but sent us back with the promise that nothing of the kind would be repeated and the arrested comrades would be released. And that's what happened.

Comrade Enver was, as he himself says, one of the favourite students of Mio's. Mio loved his pupils, but he was rather reserved. So, if he accepted the company of a student, especially of the higher classes in which he did not teach, this speaks a lot. What I want to emphasize is the artistic spirit of Enver's, his interest in the artistic activity in Korça, and about the art of photography, because in Korça there was a famous photographer, Sotir, a friend of Mio's. In Montpellier he visited the Museum Fabrée, in Antwerp he admires Rembrandt, Van Dyck and the other great masters. «Bonjour, monsieur Courbet» is a very famous tableau of Courbet, which I remember I have seen in some textbook of ours. The young student must have been especially pleased to see

the original in Montpellier. But Courbet had been a communist, too, and that is the reason for the special connection between the artist and the young man from Albania, when he began to participate in the activities of the French communist movement. In the French Corot and in the Flemish he admired the landscapes, which he had learned to appreciate in Mio's tableaux of the Albanian scenery and the streets of Korça. In *Years of my Youth* there are lyrical passages of descriptions of nature, which Mio reproduced in broad generous strokes full of sunlight and skyblue.

The old lycée students and those who did their studies in France can speak at greater length about the emotions aroused in them from these pages full of colours, light and humour, on their life abroad. But it must be admitted that there were plenty of them who could not orientate themselves through the forms and questionnaires that had to be filled at the faculty without the aid of a benevolent student, as Roncatti was, with whom the young Enver struck a friendship from the beginning. Many were those who changed their minds often before they could settle for a room, whereas Enver soon after his arrival found a place with a good old woman of Montpellier, who had had a relative of hers in the «Army of Orient», the French army that had operated in Korça and Pogradec during the First World War. This happened because the student Hoxha was very communicative, made friends easily even in places where people are of no easy approach. He had the gift of finding the way into the heart of people, even when they were aloof and isolated.

But in Brussels he feels much better when he is left alone by the bureaucrats who can have three homelands, and who become consuls of a fourth country only for the sake of the diplomatic pomp. But one day they surprise him at his table loaded with communist literature, and sack him. This is one of the most attractive parts of the book, with striking caricatures of the consuls and the development of situations.

Montpellier was the city of cobbled streets and alleys, which reminded the boy of Gjirokastra, of his Palorto and Manalat. He likes to take a walk along the Esplanade and in the Botanical Garden. In Brussels, at the Square of Pissing Child, the Flemish humour comes very natural. The industrial quarters of the city remind him of the verses of Veraren, in the collection *Les villes tentaculaires*, which we read so much at the lycée. He mentions Hugo's exile after the ascension of Napoleon III, the Small Napoleon, as the poet called him. He mentions details from the life of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rembaud, in the capital of Belgium, details which we learnt together with their poetry at school. Not far away was Waterloo and, as an expert of history, Comrade Enver devotes several pages to the place in which Napoleon was defeated by Wellington.

About the emperor and his campaigns he has read Las Caseus and others long ago, therefore he cannot fail to remember (in the fifth chapter, «In Belgium — Brussel») Hugo's famous lines: «Waterloo! Waterloo! Waterloo, morne plaine, / Comme une onde qui bout dans une urne trop pleine.» (Waterloo/Waterloo! Waterloo! Bleak plain, / Like a wave boiling in an overflowing urn.)

He has described the cold Northern regions in their flat monotony, the warm south with its humour and noise. There is also a sketchy outline of a mediaeval town close to Montpellier — turned into a modern beach — which reminds the reader of the savage persecution of the Albigensian heresy of the 13th century. From Paris he remembers the solidarity of the Albanian students who gave him shelter, the Luxembourg Garden and its palace in which in a not-very-distant day he would enter holding his head high as prime minister of the new Albania, in order to defend its rights. And the most beautiful pages are those about Avni Rustemi and his courageous gesture in front of Hotel Continental. He mentions the book of George Politzer on the principles of philosophy, a book which seemed to have come right from the rooms of communist debate, which the student attended, and not from the auditoriums of Sorbone or the Superior Normal School. At that time, the student Hoxha read the classics of scientific socialism (Chapter 4, «In France — Paris»).

There is no need to stop especially on some chapters, as chapter 2, for example («Passing through Italy»), which describes the Albanian political emigration, because Comrade Enver has written about it abundantly in the volume *Laying the Foundations of the New Albania*. There are a few memorable pages about the life of an Italian city, especially its poor quarters, «Bari vecchio», under the black-shirt regime. There are also moments of grief for a sister of his, who lived in exile.

The sixth chapter is about «The Final Return to Albania», after having lost his job at the consulate. He sees that it is pointless to stay away from his Homeland now that he has no hope of earning his living and of attending studies for law which he had begun at Brussels. Besides, there is the family he must help, and the idea has matured in him that from now on he must serve in Albania, for the good of the people, that now he has learned more from experience than from the universities. He placed himself in the service of the cause of the proletariat, which became his ideal in life. The future would teach him soon how to act in the concrete situations.

Enver Hoxha returned to Korça of his lycée years, which he missed so much, where he re-established his youthful connections, becoming the colleague of Cipo, Mio and some other teachers, or his old schoolmates who worked at the lycée, like Bulka. He renewed his friendship with

the workers, and especially with the leaders of the communist group, the comrades of Ali Kelmendi. In this young teacher, who had learned much from Marxism, in this communist with a formed and strong proletarian character, they found a comrade of rare leading and organizing capacity, who would lose no time in uniting the communists of Albania in order to form their much desired Party. And as a representative of the communist group of Korça he founded the Communist Party of Albania.

In the chapter «Return to Albania» there are new pages about the atmosphere in Korça, now richer with the experience of the communist movement, the intellectual life, in which the main role is played by the lycée, which no longer published the review *Bota e Re* (New World), but the results of its work under the direction of the communist group, its influence were felt among the progressive people not only in Korça but also throughout the whole of Albania. The artistic life of the town has also been enriched and Comrade Enver remembers the characteristic chorus which in the years after the War was called the chorus of the old men. Enver is among the young people of Korça who use their artistic associations to carry out their anti-Zogite and anti-fascist activity.

The pages devoted to the tested communist Sotir Gurra are very interesting. The portrait of this man stands out among the other gallery of characters of the book. This is the book of a talented realist writer, who, often, through the portrayal or sketching of the people he knew, reproduces the atmosphere of the time more vividly. Our idea of the worker Koci Bako, whom Comrade Enver approached again after his earlier acquaintance while at the lycée, is thus completed.

The teacher remembers those moments when he worked with his students not only within the school, to teach them the subject of moral education, but also out of the school, in order to get more intimate with the youth. He remembers the free conversations about political, social and revolutionary problems, which could be easily held with them, without forgetting to be discrete and retain his communist conspiracy and also knowing how and when to venture courageously into delicate matters. More than one of his ex-pupils can speak about the unforgettable impressions from that short time in which they had the fortune to be the students of Comrade Enver at Korça.

The book is closed with a writing extracted from his «Diaries» which belongs to the year 1975. That part of the book, as we said, is a sort of an epilogue and not a chapter of the memoirs, an epilogue full of admiration about Korça of the movement of the National Renaissance, about Korça of the communist movement, in particular, to which he returned as a young man with definite communist ideals, ready to

place them immediately in the service of the people, as he did. It was a rich terrain, with comrades ready for resolute action for the cause of national and social liberation, beginning from the formation of the Party, which would unite and lead the people in the war.

These are the most lyrical pages of the volume, written with great feeling and gratitude for the beloved town of his youth, which gave him so much and helped to form him so well. He went back to it with a great desire whenever the occasion arose or by creating an excuse himself.

Let us quote some moments of yearning:

«I remember Pilo's smithery in front of the 'Africa' caffè, where we gathered together in order to be educated for action; I remember the small shop of Koci Bako, at which we sat with a sweet in front of us listening to the 'International' from Stalin's Moscow. I remember my friend and comrade, Sotir Gurra, and the meetings we held at Korri's small house, or at the small 'Mercury' caffè house, or at the small coal-shop of Hamit Baçe's, the place where Ali Kelmendi used to come when he was in internment at Korça. From Korça I have the impressions from my teacher and later my colleague, Vangjush Mio...»

And a moment of indignation against the regime of Zog:

«'These dogs,' I said to Foto Sotiri about the ruthless rulers of the time, 'have smothered everything, even our art. But the people like your works (...). The true art, like your works, is a weapon in the struggle for development and justice.»

And the man of art cannot fail to stop and write these lines:

«And I am pleased,» he writes, «that, from my youth and now that I have grown old, I have the taste and feel of the spirit of an artist about the material and spiritual culture of the people. I have the spirit of an artist, indeed my spirit was matured to admire and taste the fine works of art, the pearls of the genius of our people even when I was young.»

After returning from a visit to the old bazaar of Korça he instructs that the place, «a monument of twofold value, a cultural monument and a political and ideological monument, the cradle of the workers of Korça,» should be protected, «restored and remain as it was,» and he is glad that this will be done. Further on he speaks about the «tortuous narrow streets and alleys and the old houses which are being repaired so beautifully» in the Korça of his unforgettable youthful years.

He is glad to meet the members of the characteristic chorus, asks for his favourite song which they like to sing, «The Mill». And by addressing the old singers, he addresses the whole people of Korça, saying:

«Dear friends and contemporaries of Korça, you made me remember and see far back in years everything about the beauty of my country, you made me remember the misery of our heroic people, who struggled

and worked and in the midst of war and poverty never let the song die on their lips. Now this people have power in their hands.»

This book of memoirs remains like a fiery passionate song, as a hymn to Korça, a hymn that was not written in verse, but was a song which emerged from the depth of the soul. After mentioning many things, after repeating that he learned much from his contacts with the people of Korça, Comrade Enver returns again to the «colossal victory» which was achieved, «the steel unity of the working class and the whole people with the Party», a unity which stands rock-firm like Tomorr Mountain, and goes on to write:

«And I am pleased and proud that I had the honour and good fortune to be one of the old guard of the communist workers of Korça, to be one of those who, from the beginning, was nourished and reared in this cradle of the revolution,» and to close with these words: «And for all these things I am and will be grateful until death to Korça, to its people, to the proletariats of Korça, to my teachers and comrades of communism.»

When you approach Korça today you are met by a whole block of factories and plants, with their chimneys sky-high (in the old time it was the place of St. Mary's cemetery). And at its first big square, the Unknown Soldier, an historical monument. A heroic and romantic atmosphere is created. At the end of the boulevard, with the old restored part of the city and the grey rocky hills specked with the green of the pine-trees in the background, there is the magnificent figure of Enver Hoxha, in his wonderful youth, gazing at the city to which he had now entered as a bronze statue, the city in which he felt proud of himself and to which he will always return, now with a book of youthful memoirs in his hand, a book full of memories of the places he loved and yearned for and which he immortalized for us and for the generations to come.

Last October, after unveiling the monument to the unforgettable leader in the heart of Albania, in Tirana, Comrade Ramiz Alia said:

«As a man he personified whatever is beautiful and valuable in the Albanian people: their freedom-loving tradition and revolutionary thinking, their traditional virtues and the new moral values, formed during the socialist construction.»

Years of My Youth, a book from the heart, like many others, will remain as a hymn not only to Korça, but a hymn to the youth, to the Albanian youth; it will remain an invaluable lesson of life, and experience for the rising generation.

It was beautiful, wonderful, to hear him converse about the youth, on the 80th anniversary of his birth.